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Ruiten, Jacques van

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## A MIRACULOUS BIRTH OF ISAAC IN THE *BOOK OF JUBILEES*?

Jacques van Ruiten

The *Book of Jubilees* belongs to the early Jewish era of the New Testament in the broadest sense. It was written at some point in the mid second century BCE<sup>1</sup> and was presented as a revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai. It actually consists of a rewriting and interpretation of the biblical narrative from the creation (Genesis 1) up to the arrival of the people at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19). It influenced the community of Qumran considerably; at least fifteen fragments of *Jubilees* having been discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, while also of note is a reference to the book in the *Damascus Document*. 'Therefore, one will impose upon himself to return to the law of Moses, for in it all is defined. And the exact interpretation of their ages about the blindness of Israel in all these matters, behold, it is defined in "The book of the divisions of the periods (ספר מחלקות העתים) according to their Jubilees and their weeks".' (CD 16.1-4).<sup>2</sup> The discovery of the *Jubilees* fragments in Qumran confirmed the already current hypothesis that the book was originally written in Hebrew.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently it was translated into Greek, and from Greek into Latin and Ethiopic. Only the Ethiopic version, a translation of a translation, is complete, whereas the other texts are only fragments. However, as far as can be verified, the published Hebrew fragments show that the Ethiopic translation is fairly faithful.<sup>4</sup> The *Book of Jubilees* is usually classified as belonging

1. It is not the purpose of the present article to deal with the question of dating. For a discussion see K. Berger, *Das Buch der Jubiläen* (JSHRZ, V.3; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 1981), pp. 298–300; R. H. Charles, *The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis. Translated from the Editor's Ethiopic Text* (London: Black, 1902), pp. lvii–lxvi; G. L. Davenport, *The Eschatology of the Book of Jubilees* (SPB, 20; Leiden: Brill, 1971), pp. 10–18; G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah. A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 78; J. C. VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 214–85.

2. For the translation see F. García Martínez, E. J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls. Volume One 1Q1-4Q273* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 565.

3. For the official edition of the copies found in cave 4 of Qumran see J. C. VanderKam, J. T. Milik, 'Jubilees', in H. Attridge *et al.* (eds.), *Qumran Cave 4 VIII: Parabiblical Texts Part 1* (DJD, 13; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 1–185. Those from cave 11 are published in F. García Martínez, E. J. C. Tigchelaar, A. S. Van der Woude (eds.), *Qumran Cave 11 11Q2-18, 11Q20-31* (DJD, 23; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 207–28.

4. J. C. VanderKam, 'Jubilees and the Hebrew Texts of Genesis-Exodus', *Textus* 14 (1988), pp. 71–86.

to the literary genre of the 'rewritten Bible', in the company of the fragmentarily preserved *Genesis Apocryphon* and the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* of Pseudo-Philo. The term 'rewritten Bible' was coined by Vermes, who described it as a midrashic insertion of haggadic development into the biblical narrative in order to anticipate questions and solve problems before they arose.<sup>5</sup> The rewritten Bible follows the Scriptures but includes a considerable amount of additions and interpretative developments.<sup>6</sup> According to Nickelsburg, the rewritten Bible is 'very closely related to the biblical texts, expanding and paraphrasing them and implicitly commenting on them'.<sup>7</sup> It follows a sequential, chronological order. Although it makes use of biblical words and phrases, these words and phrases are not set apart by way of quotation formula or lemma but are integrated into a seamless retelling of the biblical story.<sup>8</sup>

My contribution concentrates on the manifestation of God in the story of the miraculous birth of Isaac in the book of Genesis, especially on how this story was transformed in the book of *Jubilees*. In the Old Testament, the birth of Isaac is an extraordinary event 'that manifest[s] divine power', that is a wonder 'to human understanding, and therefore what human beings perceive as signs from God'.<sup>9</sup> In fact, all stories in the Old Testament are based on Israel's understanding of God's continuous sovereignty over the created world and its history. Specific stories about the manifestation of God's miracles and signs are spread throughout the Old Testament,<sup>10</sup> although this text will restrict itself to only one of these stories.

### 1. The Birth of Isaac in the Book of Genesis

In the book of Genesis, the story of the birth of Isaac is part of the central plot, the storyline of the narratives about the patriarchs and especially of the story of Abraham.<sup>11</sup> It deals with the promise of numerous offspring who would inherit

5. G. Vermes, 'The Life of Abraham', in G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (SPB, 4; Leiden: Brill, 2nd edn. 1973), pp. 67–126 (95). Cf. also C. Perrot, P. M. Bogaert, *Pseudo-Philon: Les Antiquités Bibliques II* (SC, 230; Paris: Cerf, 1976).

6. E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B. C. – 135 A. D.)* III.1 (Revised and edited by G. Vermes, F. Millar, M. Goodman; Edinburgh: Clark, 1986), p. 326.

7. G. W. E. Nickelsburg, 'The Bible Rewritten and Expanded', in M. E. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (CRINT, II.2; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984), pp. 89–156 (89).

8. P. S. Alexander, 'Retelling the Old Testament', in D. A. Carson, H. G. M. Williamson (eds.), *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 99–121 (116–17).

9. Cf. D. N. Freedman (ed.), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 903–4.

10. *Eerdmans Dictionary*, 903.

11. For a synchronic study of the plot of the story of Abraham, see, e.g., L. A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* (JSOTSup, 96; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996), pp. 51–114. See also E. A. Phillips, 'Incredulity, Faith, and Textual Purposes. Post-Biblical Responses to the Laughter of Abraham and Sarah', in C. A. Evans, J. A. Sanders (eds), *The Function of Scripture*

the promised land. However, this promise continually hangs by a thread. Since the focus here is on the transformation of Genesis in later literature, a description of the biblical text in various Yahwistic, Elohist and Priestly sources will not be dealt with.<sup>12</sup> For the present purpose, it will be assumed that the genesis of the biblical story was of no interest to the author of *Jubilees*, and consequently, only the intrigue resulting from the final form of the text will be explored.

The main intrigue begins right at the start of the Abraham story. In the closing passage of the primeval history, which also forms the beginning of the Abraham stories (Gen. 11.27-32), it is said that Sarah was Abraham's wife (Gen. 11.29: 'And Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai'), and the first thing said about this Sarah is that she was infertile (Gen. 11.30: 'Now Sarai was barren; she had no child'). Stating this fact twice underlines the pivotal role of her barrenness in the story and the hopelessness of the couple's situation.<sup>13</sup> The narrator reveals Sarah's sterility even before God commanded Abraham to leave Mesopotamia.<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere, too, Sarah's infertility is further emphasised: 'Now Sarai, Abram's wife bore him *no children* ... "Behold now, YHWH has prevented me from bearing children".' (Gen. 16.1-2). Abraham complains several times about his childlessness: 'O, Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus? ... Behold, you have given *me no offspring*' (Gen. 15.2-3). In apparent contrast with this, time and again God promises Abraham offspring: 'To your descendants I will give this land' (Gen. 12.7; 15.18), 'Your own son shall be your heir' (Gen. 15.4). This offspring will be numerous: 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them ... So shall your descendants be' (Gen. 15.5).

Sarah's bareness was the justification for giving her Egyptian slave-girl Hagar to Abraham as a surrogate: 'Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar; and Sarai said to Abram: "Behold now, YHWH has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-

in *Early Jewish and Christian Tradition* (JSNTSup, 154; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 22-33 (22-27).

12. For a study of the plot of the Abraham story taking into account the diachronic dimension of the text, see G. W. Coats, *Genesis with an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (FOTL, 1; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 97-175. For a study of the assignment of the text to several sources, see, e.g., J. Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975); E. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT, 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984). See also the commentaries on Genesis, e.g., C. Westermann, *Genesis: 2. Teilband. Genesis 12-36* (BKAT, I.2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981); H. Seebass, *Genesis II: Vätergeschichte I (11,27-22,24)* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997).

13. See, e.g., W. H. Gispen, *Genesis II. Genesis 11:27-25:11* (COT, Kampen: Kok, 1979), p. 20; C. Westermann, *Genesis 2*, p. 159.

14. According to E. A. Phillips, 'Incredulity', pp. 22-23, they had had sufficient years to experience their childless estate, since Abraham was 75 years old (Gen. 12.4) and Sarah 65 when they left Mesopotamia. However, when the Abraham story is read against the background of the story of the forefathers (Gen. 5.1-32; 11.10-32), these ages are not excessively old.



girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her". And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai ... And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived' (Gen. 16.1-2, 4).

After this diversion with Hagar and the ensuing birth of Ishmael, it became clear to Abraham that Ishmael was not the promised child.<sup>15</sup> He should come from Sarah. This is revealed in Genesis 17, where YHWH appears to Abraham at the age of 99 (Gen. 17.1). He repeats his promises about the covenant and stresses the numerous offspring (Gen. 17.2-6). On this occasion Abraham is given his new name and the condition of the covenant, i.e., the duty of circumcision is introduced (Gen. 17.4-14, 23-27). Between the command for circumcision and its actual execution, the promise of a son through Sarah is brought up: 'And God said to Abraham: Your wife Sarai, you shall not call her name Sarai, for Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son from her; and I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her' (Gen. 17.15-16). In response, Abraham falls prostrate, he laughs, and he says to himself: 'Will a son be born to one who is 100 years of age? Will Sarah who is 90 years of age give birth (to a child)?' This could have been the voicing of doubt and disbelief<sup>16</sup> but also of surprise and gratitude.<sup>17</sup> Simultaneously, Abraham expresses his concern for Ishmael ('O, that Ishmael could live in your presence'). God's answer is clear: Sarah would indeed be the mother, his name would be Isaac, and with him God would establish his covenant. As far as Ishmael is concerned, he would be blessed and be made fruitful.

After the circumcision of Abraham and of his household, there was another theophany elaborated through the visit of three men (Gen. 18.1-15). The promise of a child by Sarah was announced again. This story's intended purpose seems to be to communicate the message to Sarah; at any rate, Sarah certainly came to learn of it (v. 10d: 'And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him'). Furthermore, Sarah laughed when she heard the news. Her laughing seems to imply some sort of doubt and disbelief. She considered herself too old. Subsequently, YHWH spoke to Abraham about his wife's conduct because of its implied denial of the omnipotence of God (18.14a: 'Is anything too hard for YHWH?').

Finally, after the stories about Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18.16-19.38) and Abraham's visit to the king of Gerar, the birth of Isaac is mentioned (Gen. 21.1-7). The statement is very brief. 'YHWH visited Sarah as he had spoken, and YHWH did for Sarah as he had said. And Sarah conceived, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac' (Gen. 21.1-3). Subsequently, the circumcision, Abraham's age and Sarah's reference to her laughing are related.

15. Cf. E. A. Phillips, 'Incredulity', p. 23.

16. Cf. L. A. Turner, *Announcement*, p. 78; E. A. Phillips, 'Incredulity', pp. 23-24; H. Seebass, *Genesis II.1*, p. 109.

17. Cf. B. Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis* (New York: Ktav, 1974), pp. 112-13. See also J. Calvin, *A Commentary on Genesis I* (trans. J. King; London: Banner of Truth, 1965), p. 460.

To sum up: the promise of offspring from Sarah is threatened by her infertility which is interpreted as 'YHWH has prevented me from bearing children'. From the outset, the Genesis text stresses the infertility of Sarah. At the same time, it stresses Abraham's and Sarah's ages, both with regard to the promises and to the actual birth. However, through YHWH's intervention, the promise would be fulfilled in a set period. God would keep his promise. He would make the impossible possible. The text is not entirely explicit about the nature of this intervention, only stating: 'YHWH visited (פָּקַד) Sarah as he had spoken, and YHWH did (עָשָׂה) for Sarah as he had said' (Gen. 21.1). This might reflect the more general idea found in ancient teachings that human birth was considered to be a reflection of a divine manifestation – God of Heaven as the ultimate source of fertility. A God who causes, like a father, the seed to sprout. As the creator of heaven and earth, he brings vegetation and animal life into being, and ultimately, has the power of giving birth to human beings.<sup>18</sup>

The expression of doubt engendered by Abraham's and Sarah's old age reveals an interesting point of tension between the Abraham story and the primeval history. Not only did the forefathers die at very old ages, they also each begat their first child at a late age.<sup>19</sup> This is certainly the case for the antediluvian fathers from Adam to Noah. As for the postdiluvian forefathers, even in the MT of Genesis 11, Shem was already a centenarian when his first child was born, while Terah was only 70. The other versions of Genesis (LXX and SamP) add 100 years to the ages of all postdiluvian fathers. Finally, the text does not reveal much more about the purpose of narrating this miracle story than its general plot. It is important that God's promise was fulfilled and that the power of giving birth ultimately came from God. However, the text does not make it explicitly clear why the promise of posterity should go through Sarah.

## 2. The Birth of Isaac in the *Book of Jubilees*

Attention will now be paid to the transformation of the account of the story of the miraculous birth of Isaac in Genesis into the form found in the *Book of Jubilees*. In terms of my research, the important questions raised by the comparison

18. Cf. W. J. van Bekkum, 'Eve and the Matriarchs: Aspects of Woman Typology in Genesis', in G. P. Luttikhuisen (ed.), *The Creation of Man and Woman: Interpretations of the Biblical Narratives in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (TBN, 3; Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 128–39 (129–30).

19. For a study of the chronological problems with regard to the age of the forefathers, see, e.g., J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1910), pp. 127–39, 231–39; A. Jepsen, 'Zur Chronologie des Priesterkodex', *ZAW* 47 (1929), pp. 251–55; S. J. de Vries, 'Chronology of the Old Testament', *IBD* 1 (1962), pp. 580–99; R. W. Klein, 'Archaic Chronologies and the Textual History of the Old Testament', *HTR* 67 (1974), pp. 255–63; K. Koch, 'Sabbatstruktur der Geschichte: Die sogenannte Zehn-Wochen-Apokalypse (1 Hen 93,1-10; 91, 11-17) und das Ringen um die alttestamentlichen Chronologien in spätem Israelitentum', *ZAW* 95 (1983), pp. 403–30; J. Hughes, *Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology* (JSOTSup, 66; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); M. Rösel, *Übersetzung als Vollendung der Auslegung: Studien zur Genesis-Septuaginta* (BZAW, 223; Berlin: de Gruyter 1994), pp. 129–44.

of Genesis and *Jubilees* are: *which* elements of the story were preserved, *how* were they preserved and *what* was the function of the story of the miraculous birth of Isaac in this new context? It is striking that, in the first instance, the story is repeatedly abridged, whereas in the latter version the story is expanded. The results of my investigation can be found in the synoptic overviews below. A classification of the similarities and dissimilarities between Genesis and *Jubilees* is also included there. The elements of Genesis which do not occur in *Jubilees* are in SMALL CAPS, and vice versa, i.e., the OMISSIONS and ADDITIONS. The corresponding elements between the two texts, i.e., the verbatim quotation of one or more words of the source text in *Jubilees* are in 'normal script'. The *variations* between Genesis and *Jubilees* are in *italics*, except for additions or omissions. The verbatim quotations and their variants can occur in the same word order or sentence order in *Jubilees* as in Genesis. However, sometimes there is a rearrangement of words and sentences. These elements have been underlined. Within the limitations of this article's context it will not be possible to explore in detail all the various differences between Genesis and *Jubilees* and this text will have to be restricted to those elements relevant to this volume's purpose.

#### a. *Jubilees* 12.9–11

Sarah occurs for the first time in *Jub.* 12.9, a passage that is incorporated in quite an extensive pericope (*Jub.* 11.14–12.15) containing the rewriting of the closure of the genealogy of Gen. 11.26–32. In the following overall comparison of these texts, the numerous deviations of *Jubilees* from its model text should become evident:

##### *Genesis* 11.26–32

- a. Birth of Abram, NAHOR AND HARAN (11.26–27b)
- b. Birth of Lot (11.27c)
- c. Death of Haran (11.28)
- d. Marriages of Abram and Nahor (11.29)
- e. BARRENNESS OF SARAI (11.30)
- f. Departure of Terah with Abram, Lot and Sarai from Ur and arrival in Haran (11.31)
- h. DEATH OF TERAH (11.32)

##### *Jubilees* 11.14–12.15

- a. Birth of Abram (11.14–15)
- b. STORIES ABOUT ABRAM (11.16–12.8) WITH THE MENTION OF TWO BROTHERS (12.8)
- c. Marriage of Abram (12.9)
- d. MARRIAGE OF HARAN and birth of Lot (12.10)
- e. Marriage of Nahor (12.11)
- f. STORY AROUND THE death of Haran (12.12–14)
- g. Departure of Terah and his sons from Ur and arrival in Haran (12.15)

I have restricted myself here to *Jub.* 12.9–11, which is a rewriting of Gen. 11.29–30. While the biblical writer seems not to have been interested in Sarah's

background, with the exception of the fact that she was infertile, the author of *Jubilees* rewrites the story in a subtle manner. In his rewriting he does not establish her barrenness as a central issue but rather her *descent*, her origin.<sup>20</sup> As can be seen in the synoptic overview, the content and form of the reports of marriage and birth are completely different in both texts:

*Genesis 11.29-30*

29a And Abram and Nahor took wives;  
b the name of Abram's wife was Sarai,

[cf. Gen. 11.27]

c AND THE NAME OF NAHOR'S WIFE WAS MILCAH, THE DAUGHTER OF HARAN THE FATHER OF MILCAH AND ISCAH.  
30a NOW SARAI WAS BARREN;  
b SHE HAD NO CHILD.

*Jubilees 12.9-11*

9a DURING THE FORTIETH JUBILEE, IN THE SECOND WEEK, IN ITS SEVENTH YEAR, Abram *married a woman* whose name was Sarai, THE DAUGHTER OF HIS FATHER,  
b AND SHE BECAME HIS WIFE.  
10a HIS BROTHER Haran MARRIED A WOMAN IN THE THIRD YEAR OF THE THIRD WEEK,  
b and she gave birth to a son for him in the seventh year of this week.  
c HE NAMED HIM Lot.  
11a HIS BROTHER NAHOR ALSO GOT MARRIED.

As far as the report of Abraham and Sarah's marriage is concerned, *Jubilees* omits to mention that Sarah was barren (Gen. 11.30). However, the information about their marriage is at once enlarged upon considerably.<sup>21</sup> In Genesis, the mention is quite brief. In *Jubilees*, a date is provided ('During the fortieth jubilee, in the second week, in its seventh year') and their marriage is taken apart and described more extensively ('Abram married a woman whose name was Sarai ... and she became his wife'), and (most importantly) her descent is mentioned ('the daughter of his father'). In other words, Sarah was Abraham's sister (*Jub.* 12.9). This addition could have been prompted on the one hand by the fact that Abraham called Sarah 'his sister' elsewhere in Genesis – namely, when he visited Pharaoh (Gen. 12.10-20) and the king of Gerar (Gen. 20.1-18).<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, it is

20. This aspect of the rewriting of *Jubilees* is stressed emphatically by B. Halpern-Amaru, *The Empowerment of Women in the Book of Jubilees* (JSJSup, 60; Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 34–35. She underlines that Sarah is the 'dominant bride', that she is the only woman named and the only one with 'genealogical credentials'.

21. Cf. B. Halpern-Amaru, *Empowerment*, 35.

22. It is interesting to note, however, that the author of *Jubilees* does not refer to Sarah as Abraham's sister when they encounter the Pharaoh (*Jub.* 13.13-15), and the visit with the king of Gerar is omitted altogether.



not impossible to imagine that the author of *Jubilees* would have stressed Sarah's excellent provenance. She came from the right family. In the mind of the author she could not have been the daughter of Haran, as could be concluded on the basis of the biblical text: 'Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Jiscah' (Gen. 11.29). Sarah's father is not mentioned, however, although Milcah's is, and it could be inferred that Sarah was also a daughter of Haran. In early Jewish literature, there are several examples of the identification of Sarah and Jiscah.<sup>23</sup> This was not the case for the author of *Jubilees*, however.

Further changes in the text support the author of *Jubilees*'s opinion that Sarah could not have been Haran's daughter. This is a reference to the fact that in the book of Genesis, most items concerning Haran are located *before* the marriages of Abraham and Nahor: his birth, his fathering of Lot and his death (Gen. 11.26-28). In *Jubilees*, however, the information concerning the marriage of Abraham with Sarah is placed *before* the marriage of Haran (cf. *Jub.* 11.9-10).<sup>24</sup>

Haran's marriage is described in a manner comparable to the marriage of Abraham and Sarah. It is striking, however, that the name of Haran's wife is not recorded, nor, even more importantly, is her *origin*. The marriage report of Nahor, which is quite extensive in Gen. 11.29, where the name of the wife and her origin are mentioned, is very cursorily presented in *Jubilees*: 'His brother Nahor also got married' (*Jub.* 12.11).

Finally, in Genesis the report of the death of Haran, the father of Lot, is quite neutral (cf. Gen. 11.28). In *Jubilees*, however, his death is connected with the fact that he tried to save from fire the idols that Abram tried to burn (cf. *Jub.* 11.12-14). The report of the death of Terah is not included in *Jubilees*, whereas the extensive description of the events surrounding the death of Haran does serve a clear function. It characterizes Haran as the prototype of the unfaithful, in opposition to the faithful and righteous Abraham. Although both derive from Terah and in that sense are in the line of Shem, the line of the chosen people only continues through Abraham. It is therefore significant that Sarah should also not be defiled by the faithless Haran, that she should come straight from Terah. According to *Jubilees*, it is important that a pure line can be drawn from Abraham and Sarah back to the forefathers, via Terah, Shem, Noah and the other antediluvians, back to Seth and Azura and with them to Adam and Eve. The election of Israel is built into the creation of the world, as can also be illustrated using other passages from the book of *Jubilees*.<sup>25</sup>

23. See LAB 23.4; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.151; Tg. Ps-J. on Gen. 11.29; bMeg. 14a; bSanh. 69b; Gen. Rab. 38.14. Cf. D. U. Rottzoll, *Rabbinischer Kommentar zum Buch Genesis. Darstellung der Rezeption des Buches Genesis in Mischna und Talmud unter Angabe Targumischer und Midrashischer Paralleltex-te* (StudJ, 14; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), pp. 201-2; B. H. Halpern-Amaru, *Empowerment*, p. 35, n. 4.

24. B. Halpern-Amaru, *Empowerment*, p. 35.

25. See, e.g., *Jub.* 2.20. Cf. B. Schaller, *Gen. 1.2 im antiken Judentum: Untersuchungen über Verwendung und Deutung der Schöpfungsaussagen von Gen 1.2 im antiken Judentum* (Diss. masch.; Göttingen, 1961), p. 63; J. C. VanderKam, 'Genesis 1 in Jubilees 2', *DSD* 1 (1994),

The way in which this marriage is rewritten closely resembles the way in which *Jubilees* rewrote the reports of the marriages of the forefathers. This might hint at a clue to understanding the intention of *Jubilees*, that is, that the author considered the marriage of Abraham and Sarah to be in the same line as that of the forefathers. In this respect it is the establishment of a sibling relationship between Abraham and Sarah. This draws them back to the first generations after Adam and Eve, which were, in the eyes of *Jubilees*, also brother–sister unions.<sup>26</sup>

In conclusion, the main focus in *Jub.* 12.9–11 is on the marriage of Abraham and Sarah. The author of *Jubilees* was not really interested in Abraham's brothers. Only Haran is mentioned at any length in order to provide a contrast to a holy Abraham, and in order to make clear that Sarah was not his daughter. Sarah's infertility was unimportant to the author of *Jubilees*, it was rather her origin that carried weight, going straight back to the creation of the first man and woman. With these few changes to the Genesis text, the author of *Jubilees* completely changes the plot of the story. It is no longer the story of the continuously threatened promise of numerous offspring, it is a story of a pure lineage. By setting the marriage of Abraham and Sarah in the same line as the forefathers, the nature of the miracle, i.e., the conception of children in old age, becomes much less important.

#### b. *Jubilees* 12.30; 13.18

Nevertheless, although the theme of infertility is much less important, the text of *Jubilees* makes clear that Abraham continues not to have children for considerable time while desiring them very much. This is a reference to *Jub.* 12.30, which is a text without parallel in Genesis. As Abraham is leaving Haran to go to the land of Canaan, his father Terah blesses him. He says to Abraham that if he sees the good land, he should come back and take Terah with him. But he also adds: 'Take Lot, the son of your brother Haran, with you *as your son*'. Despite Lot's dubious birth (his mother is unnamed and her origin unknown), and the problems with his father (idolatry), the author of *Jubilees* seems to confirm that there was a certain affinity between Abraham and Lot. Lot seems to function for Abraham as a sort of surrogate son.

Moreover, in *Jubilees* 13, it is striking that the passage of Gen. 13 about the struggle between the herdsmen of Abraham and those of Lot is left unmentioned. The text states simply: 'Lot separated from him' and then continues 'Lot settled in Sodom' (*Jub.* 13.17). The complete responsibility for the separation of Lot and Abraham is put, in this way, on the shoulders of Lot. Lot is the one who left, Abraham and his herdsmen are not to blame. What becomes of interest now, however, is that *Jubilees* adds Abraham's emotional reaction to his separation from Lot: 'He was *broken-hearted* that his brother's son had separated from him *for he had no children*' (*Jub.* 13.18).

pp. 311–21 (318); L. Doering, 'The Concept of the Sabbath in the Book of Jubilees', in M. Albani, J. Frey, A. Lange (eds.), *Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (TSAJ, 65; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), pp. 179–205 (185–88); J.T.A.G.M. van Ruiten, *Primaevial History Interpreted: The Rewriting of Genesis 1–11 in the Book of Jubilees* (JSJSup, 66; Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 49, 57–65.

26. Cf. B. Halpern-Amaru, *Empowerment*, pp. 36–37.

Abraham also refers in *Jub.* 14.1-6 to his childlessness. However, this text is quite close to Gen. 15.1-6. The only interesting addition in *Jubilees* with relevance to this text's theme is the addition at the end of v. 2. where *Jubilees* not only reads: 'You have given me no descendants', but adds Abraham's wish: 'Give me descendants'.

### c. *Jubilees* 14.21-24

It is important to realise that in the book of *Jubilees* up to the scene with Hagar, the author has not yet provided any clue to the fact that Sarah could not bear children. Furthermore, Abraham is cast as unaware of this fact. As can be seen above, the couple's age is probably of no importance. In the rewriting of the opening to this scene (cf. Gen. 16.1-4, 15-16 and *Jub.* 14.21-24), this attitude is made clear quite neatly:

*Genesis* 16.1-4, 15, 16

[ ]

1a *Sarai, Abram's wife*, bore him no children.

b SHE HAD AN EGYPTIAN SLAVE-GIRL WHOSE NAME WAS HAGAR;

2a [ ]

and *Sarai* said to *Abram*:

b 'BEHOLD NOW, YHWH HAS PREVENTED ME FROM BEARING CHILDREN;  
c go in to my [ ] slave-girl [ ];  
d Perhaps I will build up [ ] from her'.

e And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai [ ].

3a SO, AFTER ABRAM HAD DWELT TEN YEARS IN THE LAND OF CANAAN,

b Sarai, ABRAM'S WIFE, took her Egyptian slave-girl Hagar,  
c and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife.

4a And he went in to *Hagar*,  
b and she conceived;  
[GEN. 16.4c-14]

*Jubilees* 14.21-24

21a ABRAM WAS VERY HAPPY

b AND TOLD ALL THESE THINGS TO HIS WIFE SARAI.

c HE BELIEVED THAT HE WOULD HAVE DESCENDANTS.

d *She* continued not to have a child.

[ ]

22a AND SARAI ADVISED HER HUSBAND ABRAM

b and *she* said to *him*:

[ ]

c 'Go in to my EGYPTIAN slave-girl HAGAR;

d perhaps I will build up DESCENDANTS FOR YOU from her'.

23a And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai, HIS WIFE

b AND SAID TO HER:

c 'DO (AS YOU SUGGEST)'.

[ ]

d Sarai [ ] took her Egyptian slave-girl Hagar,

e and gave her to her husband Abram to be *his wife*.

24a And he went in to *her*,

b and she conceived,

[ ]

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 15a And <i>Hagar</i> bore ABRAM a son.                                      | c and <i>she</i> gave birth [ ] to a son.                                  |
| b <i>Abram</i> called the name OF HIS SON,<br>WHOM HAGAR BORE, Ishmael [ ]. | d <i>He</i> called the name [ ] Ishmael IN<br>THE FIFTH YEAR OF THIS WEEK. |
| 16a <i>Abram</i> was eighty-six years old                                   | e <i>That year was the eighty-sixth year in</i><br><i>Abram's life.</i>    |
| b WHEN HAGAR BORE ISHMAEL TO ABRAM.   | [ ]  |

Abraham was happy with the promise of many offspring and thought that he would achieve this with his wife Sarah. Ultimately, they would have children (cf. *Jub.* 14.21a-c). When she continued to have no children (*Jub.* 14.21d), however, Sarah advised Abraham to try with her slave-girl Hagar (*Jub.* 14.22). It is significant that the phrase 'Behold now, YHWH has prevented me from bearing children' (Gen. 16.2b) is omitted. This indicates that Sarah was not really convinced that she would never bear at all, but that she was wise to protect YHWH's promise by giving Hagar to Abraham. It is interesting to see that Abraham asserts expressly what his wife proposes: 'And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai, his wife and said to her: Do (as you suggest)' (*Jub.* 14.23).

In Genesis, between the conception and the birth there is a passage on Sarah's jealousy of Hagar (Gen. 16.4c-14). This is completely omitted in *Jubilees*. There may have been several reasons for this. It would probably have contradicted the fact of Sarah's decision and Abraham's positive assertion, as described above. In any case, Hagar's role is somewhat reduced by the omission. See also some of the other omissions in this passage (Gen. 16.1b, 15b, 16).<sup>27</sup>

#### d. *Jubilees* 15.15-22

It is striking that the first announcement of the birth of Isaac runs strikingly parallel to the corresponding announcement in the book of Genesis. *Jub.* 15.15-22 is a near verbatim quotation of Gen. 17.15-22.

##### *Genesis* 17.15-22

- 15a And *God* said to Abraham:  
b 'Your wife Sarai, *you will not*  
*call* her name Sarai  
c for Sarah will be her name.

##### *Jubilees* 15.15-22

- 15a And *the Lord* said to Abraham:  
b 'Your wife Sarai *will no* LONGER *be*  
*called* the name Sarai  
c for Sarah will be her name.

27. According to Söllner, the following three narrative themes of Gen. 16.4c-14 are omitted as follows: 1. the arrogance of Hagar (cf. Gen. 16.4); 2. the fact that Abraham puts Hagar under the authority of Sarah, who humiliates her (cf. Gen. 16.6); 3. the tribal proverb (cf. Gen. 16.12). See P. Söllner, 'Ishmael und Isaak – muss der eine den anderen denn immer nur verfolgen? Zum Verhältnis der beiden Abrahamsöhne im Jubiläenbuch', in A. von Dobbeler, K. Erlemann, R. Heiligenthal (eds.), *Religionsgeschichte des Neuen Testaments* (FS K. Berger; Tübingen: Francke, 2000), pp. 357–78 (360–61).



16a I will bless her,  
 b and MOREOVER I will give you a son from her;  
 c and I will bless *her*,  
 d and *she* shall give rise to nations,  
 e [ ] kings of *peoples* will come from *her*'.

17a And Abraham fell prostrate  
 b and *laughed*,  
 c He said to himself:  
 d 'Will a son be born to one who is 100 years of age?  
 e Will Sarah who is 90 years of age give birth (to a child)?'

18a And Abraham said *to God*:  
 b 'O that Ishmael could live in your presence.'

19a *God* said:  
 b 'No, but Sarah YOUR WIFE will give birth to a son for you,  
 c and you will call his name Isaac.  
 d I will establish my covenant with him as an eternal covenant [ ] for his descendants after him.

20a Regarding Ishmael, I have listened to you.  
 b [ ] Behold, I will bless him  
 c and increase him,  
 d and make him very numerous.  
 e He will be the father of 12 princes,  
 f and I will make him into a large nation.

21a But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, to whom Sarah will give birth for you *at this season* next year'.

22a When he had finished speaking with him,  
 b *God* went up from Abraham.

16a I will bless her,  
 b and [ ] I will give you a son from her;  
 c and I will bless *him*.  
 d And *he* will become a nation,  
 e AND kings of *nations* will come from *him*'.

17a And Abraham fell prostrate  
 b and *was very happy*.  
 c He said to himself:  
 d 'Will a son be born to one who is 100 years of age?  
 e Will Sarah who is 90 years of age give birth (to a child)?'

18a And Abraham said *to the Lord*:  
 b '*I wish* that Ishmael could live in your presence'.

19a *The Lord* said:  
 b '*Very well*, but Sarah [ ] will give birth to a son for you  
 c and you will call his name Isaac.  
 d I will establish my covenant with him as an eternal covenant AND for his descendants after him.

20a Regarding Ishmael I have listened to you.  
 b AND behold, I will bless him,  
 c and increase him,  
 d and make him very numerous.  
 e He will be the father of 12 princes,  
 f and I will make him into a large nation.

21a But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, to whom Sarah will give birth for you *in these days* next year'.

22a When he had finished speaking with him,  
 b *the Lord* went up from Abraham.

One can barely point to a single addition or omission. Some interesting variations are probably due to the fact the author of *Jubilees* had a *Vorlage* of this text that differed from the MT. The different suffixes in *Jub.* 15.16 should be noted, and the use of 'very well' instead of 'no'. The only remaining thing is *Jub.* 15.17b, which reads: 'and he was very happy' rather than 'and he laughed' (Gen. 17.17b). The same interpretation of the laughter can be found in Josephus and the

Targumim. The laughter and the subsequent question of age is not a sign of doubt and disbelief but of happiness.

### e. *Jubilees* 16.1–4

*Jubilees* 16.1–4 deals with the second annunciation of the birth of a child to Abraham and Sarah and corresponds with Genesis 18.1–15.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the first announcement, the author of *Jubilees* has abbreviated the story of Genesis 18 considerably, as can be seen in the following synoptic overview.

#### *Genesis* 18.1–15

1a [ ] YHWH appeared to *him*  
by the *oaks* of Mamre,  
b AS HE SAT AT THE DOOR OF HIS TENT  
IN THE HEAT OF THE DAY.

2a HE LIFTED UP HIS EYES  
b AND LOOKED,  
c AND BEHOLD, THREE MEN STOOD IN  
FRONT OF HIM.  
d WHEN HE SAW THEM,  
e HE RAN FROM THE TENT DOOR TO MEET THEM,  
f AND BOWED HIMSELF TO THE EARTH,

3a AND SAID:  
b ‘MY LORD, IF I HAVE FOUND FAVOR  
IN YOUR SIGHT,  
c DO NOT PASS BY YOUR SERVANT.

4a LET A LITTLE WATER BE BROUGHT,  
b AND WASH YOUR FEET,  
c AND REST YOURSELVES UNDER THE TREE,

5a WHILE I FETCH A MORSEL OF BREAD,  
b THAT YOU MAY REFRESH YOURSELVES,  
c AND AFTER THAT YOU MAY PASS ON  
d – SINCE YOU HAVE COME TO  
YOUR SERVANT’.  
e SO THEY SAID:  
f ‘DO AS YOU HAVE SAID’.

6a AND ABRAHAM HASTENED INTO  
THE TENT TO SARAH,  
b AND SAID:  
c ‘MAKE READY QUICKLY THREE  
MEASURES OF FINE MEAL,

#### *Jubilees* 16.1–4

1a ON THE FIRST OF THE FOURTH  
MONTH *we* appeared to *Abraham* at  
the *oak* of Mamre.  
[ ]

28. Cf. J.T.A.G.M. Van Ruiten, ‘Lot Versus Abraham: The Interpretation of Genesis 18.1–19.38 in *Jubilees* 16.1–9’, in E. Noort, E. J. C. Tigchelaar (eds.), *Sodom’s Sin: Genesis 18–19 and its Interpretations* (TBN, 7; Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 29–46.

d KNEAD IT,  
e AND MAKE CAKES’.

7a AND ABRAHAM RAN TO THE HERD,  
b AND TOOK A CALF, TENDER AND GOOD,  
c AND GAVE IT TO THE SERVANT,  
d WHO HASTENED TO PREPARE IT.

8a THEN HE TOOK CURDS, AND MILK,  
AND THE CALF WHICH HE HAD PREPARED,  
b AND SET IT BEFORE THEM;  
c AND HE STOOD BY THEM UNDER THE  
TREE WHILE THEY ATE.

9a *They said to him:*

b ‘WHERE IS SARAH YOUR WIFE?’

c AND HE SAID:

d ‘SHE IS IN THE TENT’.

b *We spoke with him*

10a YHWH SAID:

b ‘I WILL SURELY RETURN TO YOU IN  
THE SPRING,

c and Sarah *your wife shall have* a son’.

d AND SARAH WAS LISTENING AT THE  
TENT DOOR BEHIND HIM.

c AND TOLD HIM that a child *would be  
given to him* from his wife Sarah.

11a NOW ABRAHAM AND SARAH WERE  
OLD, ADVANCED IN AGE;

b IT HAD CEASED TO BE WITH SARAH  
AFTER THE MANNER OF WOMEN.

12a Sarah laughed TO HERSELF, SAYING:

b ‘AFTER I HAVE GROWN OLD, AND  
MY HUSBAND IS OLD,

c SHALL I HAVE PLEASURE?’

2a Sarah laughed [ ]

13a *And YHWH said to Abraham:*

b ‘WHY DID SARAH LAUGH,

c AND SAY:

d ‘SHALL I INDEED BEAR A CHILD,  
NOW THAT I AM OLD?’

b WHEN SHE HEARD THAT WE HAD  
SPOKEN THIS MESSAGE TO ABRAHAM,  
c *And we chided her.*

[ ]

14a IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR  
YHWH?

b At the appointed time I will return  
to you, IN THE SPRING,

c and Sarah shall have a son’.

15a Sarah denied, SAYING:

b ‘I DID NOT laugh’;

c for she was afraid.

d And she was afraid

e and she denied

f THAT SHE HAD laughed ABOUT THE

d HE SAID:  
e 'NO, BUT YOU DID LAUGH'.

MESSAGE.

3a WE TOLD HER THE NAME OF HER  
SON AS IT IS ORDAINED AND WRITTEN  
ON THE HEAVENLY TABLETS – ISAAC –  
4a AND (THAT) WHEN we returned to  
her at a specific time  
b and she would have conceived  
a son.

The perspective from which the story is told is different. Genesis has an objective narrator who speaks about YHWH, the angels, Abraham and Sarah in the third person. *Jubilees* presents the story of the Angel of the Presence, who dictates the *whole* story of the *Jubilees* to Moses. It presents the acts of the angels themselves in the first person plural. It is clear that the combination of the appearance of YHWH with Abraham's meeting with three men introduces a certain ambiguity to the text of Genesis. Though this tension could point to an interesting genesis of the Genesis text, the author of *Jubilees* apparently chose to remove this ambiguity. In so doing, he identified the three men with the angels. The omission of the theophany and its substitution for the appearance of the angels is remarkable because the author of *Jubilees* often preserved the theophanies in his rendering of Genesis. It shows, I feel, that this author was conscious of a problem in the Genesis text.

As can be seen, the text of Gen. 18.1-15 is stripped of all its frills. The only thing that seems to have interested the author of *Jubilees* is the announcement of the birth of a son to Abraham and Sarah, and Sarah's disbelieving reaction. *Jubilees* excludes numerous elements in the story, i.e., Abraham's meeting with YHWH, the scene of hospitality where Abraham prepares food and drink for the angels, and the fact of Abraham's and Sarah's old age.

As far as that latter point is concerned, the omission of the couple's old age, not an insignificant element in the Genesis story, is in keeping with what has been already stated earlier in this paper. The *Jubilees* author did not want to put too much stress on this fact because it was not the real issue in his mind, and not central to his plot.

As the passage closes, there is a clear insertion (16.3-4: 'We told her the name of her son as it is ordained and written on the heavenly tablets – Isaac – and [that] when we returned to her at a specific time she would have become pregnant with a son'). The second part is a variation and interpretation of Gen. 18.14, 'At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son'. Curiously, in *Jubilees* this, along with the name of the son, is recorded on the heavenly tablets. In Genesis, the name of the son has already been announced to Abraham earlier in the text: 'Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac' (Gen. 17.19). In *Jubilees*, it is announced to Sarah and engraved on the heavenly tablets. Possibly, the 'heavenly tablets' does not mean anything more than the Torah and the reference to these tablets is intended as nothing more than a reference to the biblical text. Nevertheless, it does raise Sarah's



status. She is not placed listening behind the tent door but is addressed personally by the angels.

#### f. *Jubilees* 16.11-31

*Jubilees* 16.11-31 is the last text to attract our attention in the context of the miraculous birth of Isaac. It contains the rewriting of the birth itself. As can be seen in the synoptic overview, *Jub.* 16.11-14 is a fairly literal rendition of Gen. 21.1-4. There are only some minor omissions, additions and variations. What stands out is the omission of Gen. 21.5-7 and the addition of *Jub.* 16.15-19.

#### *Genesis* 21.1-7

[ ]

1a YHWH visited Sarah AS HE  
HAD SPOKEN,  
b and YHWH did for *Sarah* as he  
had said.

2a And *Sarah* conceived,  
b and she gave birth to a son FOR  
ABRAHAM IN HIS OLD AGE

*at the time of which God had  
spoken to him.*

3a ABRAHAM CALLED THE NAME  
OF HIS SON WHO *was born* TO HIM,  
WHOM SARAH GAVE BIRTH FOR HIM,  
Isaac.

4a And Abraham circumcised *his  
son Isaac*  
b when he was eight days old,  
[ ] *as God had commanded him*  
[ ].

5a ABRAHAM WAS A HUNDRED YEARS  
OLD  
b WHEN HIS SON ISAAC WAS BORN  
TO HIM.

6a AND SARAH SAID:  
b 'GOD HAS MADE LAUGHTER FOR

#### *Jubilees* 16.11-14

11a IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FIFTH  
MONTH HE MIGRATED FROM THERE  
b AND SETTLED AT THE WELL OF THE  
OATH.

12a IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SIXTH  
MONTH the Lord visited Sarah [ ]  
b and *he* did for *her* as he had said.

13a And *she* conceived,  
b and she gave birth to a son [ ] IN  
THE THIRD MONTH;  
c IN THE MIDDLE OF THE MONTH,  
*on the day that the Lord had told  
Abraham – ON THE FESTIVAL OF THE  
FIRSTFRUITS OF THE HARVEST – [ ]*  
*Isaac was born.*

14a And Abraham circumcised *him*  
b when he was eight days old.

c HE WAS THE FIRST TO BE CIRCUMCISED  
*according to the covenant* WHICH WAS  
ORDAINED FOREVER.

[ ]

ME;

c EVERY ONE WHO HEARS WILL LAUGH  
OVER ME'.

7a AND SHE SAID:

b 'WHO WOULD HAVE SAID TO  
ABRAHAM THAT SARAH WOULD  
SUCKLE CHILDREN?

c YET I HAVE BORNE HIM A SON IN HIS  
OLD AGE'.

*Jubilees 16.15-19 (no parallel in Genesis)*

15a IN THE SIXTH YEAR OF THE FOURTH WEEK WE CAME TO ABRAHAM AT THE  
WELL OF THE OATH.

b WE APPEARED TO HIM

c JUST AS WE HAD SAID TO SARAH THAT WE WOULD RETURN TO HER

d AND SHE WOULD HAVE BECOME PREGNANT WITH A SON.

16a WE RETURNED DURING THE SEVENTH MONTH,

b AND IN FRONT OF US WE FOUND SARAH PREGNANT.

c WE BLESSED HIM

d AND TOLD HIM EVERYTHING THAT HAD BEEN COMMANDED FOR HIM:

e THAT HE WOULD NOT YET DIE UNTIL HE BECAME THE FATHER OF SIX SONS

f AND (THAT) HE WOULD SEE (THEM) BEFORE HE DIED;

g BUT (THAT) THROUGH ISAAC HE WOULD HAVE A REPUTATION AND DESCENDANTS.

17a ALL THE DESCENDANTS OF HIS SONS WOULD BECOME NATIONS

b AND BE NUMBERED WITH THE NATIONS.

c BUT ONE OF ISAAC'S SONS WOULD BECOME A HOLY PROGENY

d AND WOULD NOT BE NUMBERED AMONG THE NATIONS,

18a FOR HE WOULD BECOME THE SHARE OF THE MOST HIGH.

b ALL HIS DESCENDANTS HAD FALLEN INTO THAT (SHARE) WHICH GOD OWNS

c SO THAT THEY WOULD BECOME A PEOPLE WHOM THE LORD POSSESSES OUT OF ALL THE  
NATIONS;

d AND THAT THEY WOULD BECOME A KINGDOM, A PRIESTHOOD, AND A HOLY PEOPLE.

19a THEN WE WENT ON OUR WAY

b AND TOLD SARAH ALL THAT WE HAD REPORTED TO HIM.

c THE TWO OF THEM WERE EXTREMELY HAPPY.

The passage should be disappointing, as far as the theme of the miracles is concerned, as *Jubilees* does not add much to the nature of the miracle, preferring largely to repeat what Genesis has already said: 'In the middle of the sixth month the Lord visited Sarah and he did for her as he had said. And she conceived, and she gave birth to a son in the third month; in the middle of the month, on the day that the Lord had told Abraham – on the festival of the first fruits of the harvest Isaac was born' (*Jub.* 16.12-13). How the Lord visited Sarah, and what he did

for her is not related. The interesting element of the rewrite, of course, is the omission of Abraham's age (Gen. 21.2b), which is confirmed by the omission of Gen. 21.5 and 21.7. The age of the parents at the moment of the birth is unimportant, while the author does stress emphatically the date of the occasion: 'In the middle of the sixth month ... she conceived, and she gave birth to a son in the third month; in the middle of the month'. This was, moreover, the time of 'the festival of the first fruits', also called the 'Festival of Weeks' (*Shavu'ot*).<sup>29</sup> Unlike the biblical dating of this festival, according to *Jubilees*, this festival took place in the middle of the third month. This festival is not only a harvest festival, during which offerings had to be brought, but also a festival of the renewal of the covenant. All the festivals of the covenant in the book of *Jubilees* take place on the same day of the year, i.e., the Festival of Weeks: the first covenant with Abraham (*Jub.* 14.1, 10, 18); the second covenant with him (*Jub.* 15.1-5); and the promise to make a covenant with Isaac when God announces his birth (*Jub.* 15.19, 21). Isaac is consequently born during the Festival of Weeks (*Jub.* 16.13); just before Abraham dies, he again celebrates the Festival of Weeks (*Jub.* 22.1-9), during which he blesses Jacob. The emphasis that *Jubilees* put on the date of the birth is related to the fact that God would establish a covenant only with Isaac and his descendants, as has already been shown. The emphasis on the covenant in the birth scene is confirmed by the addition of *Jub.* 16.14c: 'He was the first to be circumcised according to the covenant which was ordained forever'.

Additions to the birth report will not be examined here in detail. Suffice it to point out the fact that the addition of *Jub.* 16.15-19 is probably related to the omission of the laughter in Gen. 21.6-7. Abraham and Sarah's laughter is interpreted as their joy and happiness. I refer to *Jub.* 16.19: 'The two of them were extremely happy'. The most significant aspect of this addition is the confirmation of the exclusivity of Isaac and especially one of his sons: 'All the descendants of his sons would become nations and be numbered with the nations. But one of Isaac's sons would become a holy progeny and would not be numbered among the nations, for he would become the share of the Most High. All his descendants had fallen into that (share) which God owns so that they would become a people whom the Lord possesses out of all the nations; and that they would become a kingdom, a priesthood, and a holy people' (*Jub.* 16.17-18). The author thus creates a direct lineage from the creation, via Abraham and Sarah to Jacob, and specifically to Levi (the priesthood within Israel).

29. Cf. A. Jaubert, *La notion d'alliance dans le judaïsme aux abords de l'ère chrétienne* (Paris: du Seuil, 1963), 101-4; W. Eiss, 'Das Wochenfest im Jubiläenbuch und im antiken Judentum', in M. Albani, J. Frey, A. Lange (eds), *Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (TSAJ, 65; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), pp. 165-78; J. C. VanderKam, 'Weeks, Festival of', *ABD* VI (1992) pp. 895-97; J.T.A.G.M. Van Ruiten, *Primaeval History*, pp. 247-50.

### Conclusions

As has been demonstrated, the story of the birth of Isaac in the book of Genesis is part of the central plot of the story. There is a promise, which continually hangs by a thread, of numerous offspring who will inherit the promised land. In this case, it was threatened by Sarah's infertility and Abraham's and Sarah's old age. However, it is important that the promise be fulfilled by YHWH's intervention. God will keep his promise. He will make the impossible possible. It is the manifestation of divine power, and is based on Israel's understanding of God's continuous sovereignty over the world and its history. It also stresses the exclusive relationship between YHWH and Israel, though the text does not make explicit why the promise of posterity should go through Sarah. Finally, an element of tension between the Abraham story and the story of the forefathers is discernable inasmuch as their ages at the conception of their respective first sons are concerned.

The author of *Jubilees* does not add anything to the nature of the God's intervention in the birth of Isaac. It is even doubtful whether he considered the birth of Isaac a specific miracle. However, he was somewhat more explicit about the purpose of the story as such. The differences with Genesis disclose some interesting shifts. In the book of *Jubilees*, it is not Sarah's infertility that is important, it is the origin of Sarah that carries weight, going straight back to the creation of the first man and woman. With this the author changes the purpose of the story completely. It is no longer the story of a promise of numerous offspring which is continually under threat but ultimately fulfilled by the intervention of God, but it becomes a story of pure lineage. The marriage of Abraham and Sarah is put in the same line as the forefathers. The nature of the miracle, i.e., the conception of children in old age, is no longer important. It resolves the tension between the Abraham story and the stories of the forefathers and makes clear why the chosen line should go through Sarah.



# Wonders Never Cease

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MICHAEL LABAHN  
AND  
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